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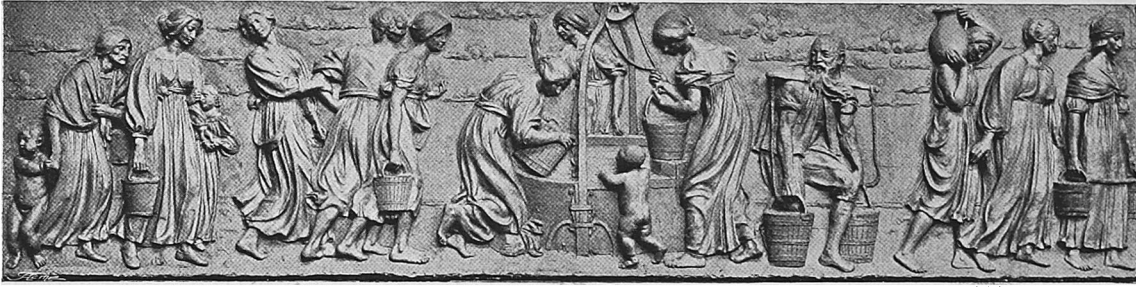
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'WASHING,' PORTION OF FRIEZE BY C. DRESSLER, NOW BEING EXECUTED IN GLAZED AND COLOURED POTTERY IN RELIEF FOR MESSRS. LEVER BROS.

SCULPTOR-POTTER, MR. CONRAD DRESSLER

A MR. CONRAD DRESSLER, whose work as a sculptor is well known to the art-loving public, began his connection with pottery in Liverpool, where he was the master-spirit at the 'Della Robbia Kilns and Ateliers' of that city. How he came to add to his work as a sculptor that of a potter is soon told. Mr. Dressler was one of the three sculptors commissioned to decorate St. George's Hall with bas-reliefs, and while working in Liverpool he was invited to give a lecture on some aspects of his art work. The subject he chose was the conditions of modern art work—conditions which so many of us, like Conrad Dressler, feel are far from congenial, far from promising the best results. It is so easy to get up on a platform and give out well turned generalisations and æsthetic abstractions, but when it comes to practice where are most of our essayists and lecturers? The subject of this note is, before all things, a practiser, and this makes him alive to the insufficiency of artistic stump oratory, a modern form of art enthusiasm he despises and deprecates. The lecture he gave at Liverpool had one definite result, it awakened in the minds of some of his hearers the desire to do something for the art side of Liverpool life, and Mr. Dressler was asked to give his practical help in forwarding the object the committee that was formed had in view. He had to consider what practical issue could come out of this general desire to help on art in modern life. It speaks well for him that he did not take refuge in the jargon of æstheticism, but forthwith set about putting beliefs to that

crucial test, practice. He started a pottery and did some original work in clay, and trained others to do the same. The direction of his endeavour was to give a local habitation to counsels of perfection. A sculptor can more easily become a potter than a painter, for the thumbing of clay is part of a sculptor's method, and Dressler was further influenced by the desire to train youthful aspirants in art to become useful craftsmen. The man who starts training the infant mind how to shoot has a lighter task before him than he who attempts to do this for children of a larger growth, and that, too, in some artistic direction, as Mr. Dressler has found to his cost. But that we will touch upon later. The difficulties that confront a potter with original ideas are such as can only be appreciated, I believe, by those who have essayed the potter's craft, an advantage the present writer has over some of his readers, for he, too, can look back over some years of practical work as a painter of faïence, if not a thrower of clay—years marked out by many failures, though touched here and there with glimmerings of success. It may seem a bold statement, that there is no branch of art in which success is so difficult of attainment as that of the potter, and yet I think it is not a difficult thesis to prove. The question of clays to form a suitable body, of glazes, of decoration, are some of the problems that have to be grappled with, the solution of any one of which can occupy years of labour. Mr. Dressler was ambitious to do something distinguished as a potter, and, in emulating that great sixteenth century Italian, Lucca della Robbia, he

CONRAD DRESSLER



'MOTHERHOOD'
A RELIEF IN GLAZED
AND COLOURED
POTTERY BY
CONRAD DRESSLER

set himself a formidable task. Apart from the artistic worth of Robbia's work, it has technical excellences which have never been surpassed—it would be more truthful to say, approached. Pottery in relief, glazed and coloured, is far more difficult of achievement than painted ware, either on the flat, such as tiles, or work thrown on the wheel, for the shrinkage in the firing and the requisite hardness of body to stand the high temperature necessary for melting a hard glaze that is impervious to the weather, are factors that must be successfully dealt with. As an instance of the importance of the body, even in ordinary lavatory tiles, it may be mentioned that the use of Staffordshire tiles as external decoration largely ceased because they did not stand variations in temperature, the whole of the glazed surface often flaking off after a severe frost. These Staffordshire tiles are made by pressing the clay in form of powder in moulds under hydraulic pressure, and then firing them. They are then decorated either by printing or hand-work in the biscuit state, glazed, and fired again. In taking up as comparatively simple a

branch of ceramic art as tiles, Dressler had to discover a body that would resist all atmospheric changes—which meant: moulding the tiles of wet clay and out of a body that could be fired to a high temperature without melting. The ordinary clay used in brick making will not stand a high temperature without 'falling,' and, to overcome this, some infusible earth must be incorporated with the natural clay to take out the 'fat,' as potters say. Ground seggars and fire-bricks are used for this purpose, but the making of a good body is a potter's secret.

When it comes to modelling figures that have to stand the ordeal of fire and afterwards take a glaze which shall contract with the body, so that no 'crazing,' *i.e.*, splitting of the glaze, takes place, we have many more difficulties to overcome than in the producing of a six-inch tile; so it will be seen that our sculptor embarked upon a long and trying voyage before he could hope to sail into port, when he took up the work of a practical potter.

Very successful work was eventually produced at the Liverpool pottery, as those who visit that

THE MEDMENHAM POTTERY

shipping city can testify ; but Mr. Dressler severed his connection with the pottery in '95, leaving it to be carried on by those whom he had to a large extent trained. With the assistance of a munificent patron, Mr. Hudson, he built ateliers and kilns near Marlow, alongside an ordinary brickfield, the clay of which he has been able to use for forming the body which he has been at so much pains to perfect. The Medmenham Pottery, as it is termed, is now in full working order, and some of the work being executed there is shown in the pages of *THE ARTIST*. I did not know Mr. Dressler in his Liverpool days, but it has been my privilege to watch the gradual perfecting of method at his present *locale*, and I can testify to the untiring devotion, the heartbreaking disappointments, and the technical difficulties of all kinds that have had to be surmounted to win success at Medmenham. He has just had a great French expert, M. Thomas, staying with him, who has planned an entirely new set of kilns, the old ones (only a little over a year old !) having just been demolished. Think of what that alone means ! Yet Mr. Dressler found that to put the pottery on a commercial basis it was imperative



TERRA-COTTA HEAD
BY C. DRESSLER



THE WINDS
SUNILIAL EXECUTED
IN RELIEF BY
CONRAD DRESSLER

to lessen the cost of production in every way, and a kiln that can be fired with half a ton of coal is obviously better than one requiring another sixteen hundredweights ; and here we touch upon the most crucial test of all, commercial success. It is one thing to win an artistic triumph in pottery ; quite another to make it pay. A rich enthusiast might succeed in turning out a very pretty vase, a distinctly valuable artistic possession, but one that, if put upon the market, would have to be sold for less than the cost of production to find a customer at all. It is, like some agricultural experiments, easy enough to grow a crop if cost of production is not taken into account, but what use would farming be to a country or an individual if the receipts do not cover the expenditure ? So it is with all applied art, and Conrad Dressler

THE ARTIST



*THE YOUNG MINSTREL
TERRA-COTTA FIGURE
BY C. DRESSLER*

CONRAD DRESSLER



*SIDE OF A SUNDIAL
BY CONRAD DRESSLER*

would write himself down a failure were he only able to win an artistic triumph as a potter ; and he would look upon himself as an artistic crank, if failure to sell his wares were due to their excessive price ; and this is what has actually happened to a good many potters in this country : they have succeeded in all but price. You cannot expect people to pay more for a six-inch tile than a certain moderate sum between seven pence and a shilling or two for all ordinary purposes. If the artist can produce a tile within those limits, he will draw the business away from the mere manufacturer ; if not, he will lack that extensive patronage without which no potter can hope to succeed. The same pattern must be repeated a great number of times to make this possible, but where tiles are used to panel rooms, some slight variation in colouring must be secured to lessen the

mechanical appearance of constant repetition. A class of tile much favoured by Mr. Dressler is one in which the outline is moulded on the surface of the tile, and the colouring only is hand-work. The colours melting into the thick coating of glaze, yield a rich lustrous and 'broken' quality so different from that hard, uniform, unsympathetic effect of printed Staffordshire tiles, and when these tiles turned out at the Medmenham pottery are put together into panels the effect is all that one can desire in this respect. That Mr. Dressler has overcome the difficulty of price is evidenced by the pottery having supplied some of the bath-rooms in the new Grand Central Hotel. At the present moment our potter is seeing what he can do in harmonious self-coloured glazed tiles, a field in which much can be done, for a good coloured glaze is delightful in itself, and at the same time most suitable for the

CONRAD DRESSLER

PORTION OF A PANEL IN
ST. GEORGE'S HALL,
LIVERPOOL
BY C. DRESSLER



TERRA-COTTA BUST
BY C. DRESSLER

lining of fire-places and the laying of hearths.

It has been Dressler's desire to train local talent for use at his pottery, and he employs girls from the village to float on the colours in his raised outline tiles. He finds the human material less promising than he hoped. All artists who engage in commercial art experience this disappointment, for in their work they are guided by their taste, intuition, whatever you like to call it, just as the eastern carpet weavers are, but when it comes to employing labour to execute artistic work one is at once struck by the want of just that quality which elevates the mechanic into the artist. In this matter we touch upon the inherent weakness in modern work. We are not by nature artists. We can train folk to do certain things in a more or less regular and uniform way, but where we want something in which routine has to be departed from we find out where we are, and that is, at the very threshold. The fact is, we are demanding in our employées what they, with all the best intention in the world, do not

THEORY AND PRACTICE

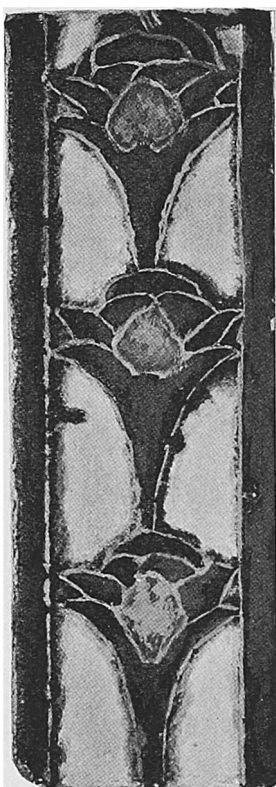
have in their power to give us. There is precious little indigenous art to be found among us, and *that* work only is of any real art value that springs spontaneously out of the workman while he is working. Take furniture designing for instance. A man like Chippendale succeeded in making some quite beautiful pieces of furniture because he had worked all his life at furniture making,

knew practically what mouldings looked well, what shapes and proportions pleased his eye and suited his requirements. His designs grew at the bench itself, grew under his hand, shaped themselves in his brain as he mitred a corner or planed a moulding, a vastly different state of things to where an artistically bent young gentleman, with may-be 'varsity education, sits in a room decorated with fine specimens of old work and sets to work to plan furniture on paper without, in all likelihood, having stayed an hour in a carpenter's shop in his life. If he give us anything good, it is, many chances to one, a reflection of some old work he has seen, and where he thinks he is strikingly original the chances are he is feeble or grotesque. Any serious art worker who visits critically a show like the 'Arts and Crafts' feels that the work is characterless, there is the want of *that* something about it which makes it *live*. The fact is that those who engineer it have not enough ego in their Cosmos, only self-sufficiency. What Dressler would like to develop would be any spontaneous artistic proclivities



A TILE BY C. DRESSLER

enough just for its young, but to a short-horn cow bred for generations to give milk, whose capacity in this direction is greater than that of a dozen or twenty antelopes.'



A TILE BY C. DRESSLER

in the girls he employs, so that some really original work would come from them. He does not mind its rudeness and barbarism—he likes the barbarous in fact, anything to get away from the school of art and so-called 'art designing,' and I can only hope that he will strike talent and develop it. As he observed, however, 'you wouldn't go for milk to an antelope that only yields

Running a pottery Mr. Dressler finds a severe physical and mental tax, for the thinking and directing has to come from the one brain. He has not followed the Liverpool experiment in the making of pots, for he feels that in this branch of ceramics there is little room for pecuniary success. High prices will continue to be paid for fine old work, but few people will pay for really artistic work in painted pots, and if you are going to get anything good in painted pottery you must be able to pay artists to do the work. The vast quantity of cheap pots sold in the present day by drapers and others seems to have driven out those efforts made some fifteen years or so ago to give the public something original in painted faïence.

The work that Mr. Dressler is most interested in is the work in relief of an architectural character.

No form of decoration for a building can surpass glazed decorative

THE ARTIST

pottery, and in the work he is now executing for Messrs. Lever Bros., Mr. Dressler has an opportunity of showing what the Medmenham pottery is capable of. The frieze will be 150 feet long, and the section I have seen, a reproduction of which is given, is more than promising. The colouring is rightly very simple and consists of blue, green, brown and yellow on a rich white opaque glaze, as in the old Robbia ware. It is fired to a very high temperature, and, the body itself being excessively hard, we have a form of decoration that enhances the architecture, and is at the same time in no danger of deteriorating with time. The subject had to be connected with washing, to hint at the use of the building as a soap factory, but here was the difficulty of how

to carry out the idea, for where so much is done by machinery there is so little scope for the artist. The factory system means economy of movement in order to lessen cost of production, but Art is atrophied under such economies. A girl who feeds a stamp all day with cakes of soap to receive the impress of the die, is no subject for a sculptor who revels in exuberance of movement. A free treatment largely suggestive of 'the good old days' had to be followed, though, had modern life been in any way adaptable, Dressler would have embodied it in his frieze, for he is a thorough believer in up-to-dateness,—level with the time, out of joint, alas, though it so often is to the artist.

FRED MILLER.

THE SALON OF 1900

THE special effort made by a great number of the leading French artists for the Paris International Exhibition has prevented them from sending works of any importance to the Salon, which is consequently less attractive in many respects than it has been in former years. This remark refers, of course, only to the *Société des Artistes Français*, the *Société Nationale des Beaux Arts* having wisely abstained from holding any exhibition this year. The lack of space in the new building has, on the other hand, prevented the acceptance and the hanging of the numerous fill-gaps by which the general effect of former exhibitions at the Champs-Élysées had been spoiled. There are only 2,872 works accepted as compared with 5,172 last year.

Among the most important pictures must be reckoned Wery's *Les Bateliers, Amsterdam*, a splendid poem of colour, which has been received with much favour. Behind the reality of the luminous water, the many-coloured boats and the red brick buildings, is hidden all the mystery of the old town. On the opposite wall hangs one of the finest pictures of this year's Salon: G. Adler's *Le Creusot*, a strike scene of overwhelming power. V. de Brozik's huge canvas: *The Proclamation of Georg v. Podjebrad as King*

of *Bohemia* is an ambitious work, conscientiously executed, but somewhat cold and black.

In *La Douleuse Station*, M. Béronneau has treated a sad subject with sufficient skill to invest it with considerable beauty and attractiveness. It represents the moment of the funeral ceremony when the coffin is being carried from the hearse into the church. The grouping and draping of the undertaker's men is done with a rare sense of beauty which overcomes the difficulty of their general appearance of cruel indifference.

H. Thiérot's *Summer* is an attractive harmony of flesh tints, of woods and silent waters. H. Dabadie's *Départ des Islandais* is a little monotonous in colour, but as serious and grave as the subject demands. Gorguet's *Foyeuse Entrée du Roi Jean le Bon à Douai* has a fine decorative effect and shows the traces of enormous labour.

Benjamin Constant's portrait of *Stephen Liegeard* has the air of distinction which is generally associated with this artist's work; the Jules Breton is exquisite in colour, the Berne-Bellecour one of the best things this artist has shown for some time.

The Beach at Dinard, by J. Smith Lewis, is one of the most curious attempts at the Salon. In him we find an artist who has adopted the manner of Manet. The whole animated scene